

CITY OF BELLEVUE
EASTGATE/I-90
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

January 6, 2011
5:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-108

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carrie Courter Blanton, Tom Bohman, Lindy Bruce, Dave Elliott, Jay Hamlin, Jeffrey Hummer, Francois Larrivee, Mark Ludtka, Tom Perea, Rob Pucher, Jim Stanton, Cynthia Welti

MEMBERS ABSENT: Rachel Solemsaas, John Stokes, David Vranizan

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmember Jennifer Robertson

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Transportation; Mike Bergstrom, Planning & Community Development

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. Call to Order

Co-Chair Hamlin called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

A. November 18, 2010

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Ms. Bruce. Second was by Mr. Elliott and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Review of Background Reports and Public Outreach

A. Finish Presentation from December 2, 2010, Meeting

Senior transportation planner Franz Loewenherz said the presentation of background materials was intended to give the CAC a sense of the research done to date and to show how the Council principles have informed the project and guided the work effort.

Mr. Loewenherz said two of the Council principles were not covered at the December 2 CAC meeting. The first had to do with the issue of modeling environmental sustainability and planning for the future so the plans for the area will produce measurable environmental benefits. Going forward, the CAC will be tasked with addressing several questions on the topic.

During the economic development forum, a number of comments related to sustainability were raised. The online questionnaire also touched on the topic and generated responses. The recurring themes included a keen interest in seeing the corridor have a lot more in the way of tree planting, both as an ecological factor and as a buffer to noise and light pollution. The level of concern about the streams in the corridor was noted, especially in

the Phantom Lake area where the development that has occurred to date has caused additional runoff into the lake. The public also highlighted the need for non-motorized transportation to play an increasing role in the corridor; the number of bicyclists using the corridor has increased, and some would like to see even more.

The land use policies and transportation strategies the CAC will develop will have a profound influence on the future environment and quality of life in the area. It is worth recognizing that the Council has deliberated the topic and made sustainability a large part of the Comprehensive Plan, which guides all of the City's work efforts. Additionally, in 2007 Council signed the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement which has the goal to reduce GHG emissions by 7% below 1990 levels by 2012... Those that have a tie to the Eastgate/I-90 area include designing land uses and evolving transportation strategies that will encourage people to choose modes other than the single-occupant vehicle; reducing the amount of impervious surface; planting more trees; and controlling storm water runoff naturally.

Mr. Loewenherz pointed out that, on a per-passenger-mile basis, single-occupant vehicles make the greatest contribution to CO₂ levels. The influence that land use has on the viability of transportation modes is significant. Clearly the Eastgate/I-90 corridor is based on a suburban template that does not provide much opportunity to maximize walking and biking, and clearly there are opportunities to make improvements.

There has been a great deal of research conducted countywide on the role impervious surfaces plays in contributing to stormwater runoff. Going forward with the project there will be opportunities to solidify the low-impact development practices that are becoming increasingly a part of the way the city designs its infrastructure. The CAC will be tasked with providing guidance in how to integrate the practices going forward. The CAC will also be asked to take advantage of the opportunity to influence the reduction in greenhouse gases through land use strategies that reduce the overall number of vehicles. A study conducted by the Urban Land Institute revealed that compact land uses have a six to nine percent influence, and when combined with increased transit the influence jumps to 24 percent; coupling those factors with congestion pricing increases the percentages even more.

Mr. Loewenherz said transportation strategies can also have a measurable influence on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The following are examples of transportation strategies that are found to reduce VMT and GHG emissions: eliminating bottlenecks, improving signal timing, and constructing roundabouts. The state Department of Transportation has been working with the city to determine the viability of roundabouts at some intersection locations in the corridor; some preliminary design sketches have been drawn up and some modeling work has been done, all of which will be shared with the CAC.

Mr. Loewenherz said many of the state's vacant rights-of-way in the cloverleaf areas of the on- and off-ramps could be planted with trees. The city's GIS can model the dollar value that could result in terms of reducing air pollution and improved stormwater management. That information will also be brought before the CAC for review and comment.

Mr. Stanton said there are two telework centers in his highrise buildings in downtown Bellevue. There are others in Seattle, Renton and Issaquah. For knowledge workers who have the ability to work in a multiplicity of locations, there is no need to get in their cars and go to work. The Eastgate area would work very well for those types of uses and could intercept trips that would otherwise go to downtown Bellevue or Seattle. Mr.

Loewenherz said the natural tendency going forward is to build on the prevailing template, which for the Eastgate area is office. While anyone can speculate on what the possibilities for the future will be, it is very possible that telework will arise as a mainstream use. The CAC will want to think about whether more office should be assigned to the area or if a more diverse template should be identified.

Mr. Loewenherz said the Council principle of smart growth had not been addressed during the December 2 CAC meeting. He explained that the guidance handed down by the Council is to better integrate land use and transportation across the corridor, including transit-oriented development, and the fact that changes in land use should be informed by opportunities and impacts. Clearly the Council is desirous of making sure that land use patterns and transportation strategies are congruent going forward.. There is a desire for more transit-oriented development and more infill development around the park and ride. There is a growing frustration on the part of those working in the corridor who find they must get in their cars to go have lunch. A greater mix of uses within a higher density infrastructure provides people with far more opportunities to access what they want and need without the use of an automobile. The CAC will be asked to review the transportation demand models with various development scenarios and evaluate the resulting impacts.

Many suburban environments are facing the same challenges and opportunities that the Eastgate/I-90 corridor is facing. Accordingly, there has been a lot of research conducted to date by the Urban Land Institute and others. As the study progresses, the lessons learned by others will be shared with the CAC.

The potential for redevelopment adjacent to the existing park and ride facility is one item the CAC will be asked to explore. The Council specifically instructed the CAC to get ahead of the Sound Transit Phase III planning effort, especially in regard to land uses and possible station locations.

Ms. Bruce commented that I-90 is the 900-pound gorilla that bisects the Eastgate/I-90 corridor. She asked if there is any possibility that 139th Avenue SE could be redeveloped to provide another crossing of the freeway to help connect the two sides; she suggested it would be particularly nice for the new crossing to be more pedestrian friendly and green. Mr. Loewenherz allowed that the concept is not new and has in fact been contemplated in previous planning efforts in the corridor. There is a high level of interest aimed at establishing better connectivity in the corridor, both north/south and east/west. At the same time, funding is limited and the CAC will need to carefully weigh the best places to make investments in the corridor.

Councilmember Robertson stated that the notion of improving connections within the corridor should be explored. She agreed that the fiscal realities are what they are, and said the CAC should not be hampered by them. The CAC should focus on developing the very best plans for the corridor and leave to the Council the issue of financing.

B. WSDOT Review of I-90 Corridor Project

Carol Hunter with the Washington State Department of Transportation said she serves as manager of the I-90 corridor study. She noted that while the study extends from Bellevue to North Bend, tonight she would focus on the part of the corridor that lies within Bellevue. Corridor planning includes a review of both existing and forecasted future employment levels, land use patterns, and how people choose to travel. The modeling work done based on the projections yielded an indication of what might happen and what sort of projects may be needed to address future growth.

Ms. Hunter said the projects identified through the I-90 corridor study all fit into the state's three-prong approach to fighting congestion and addressing global climate change. The projects are those that add capacity strategically, address choke points, make the system operate more efficiently, and manage demand.

The concept of smart highways is coming into its own and can be expected to be seen more around the region. The first active traffic management strategy has been implemented on I-5 between the Boeing access and I-90. The technology is used in Europe to manage freeway systems. Based on information gathered from loops in the pavement, it can be known how many cars are using the facility and how fast they are moving. The technology allows for changing the speed limit based on real time conditions. About 25 percent of the freeway congestion is directly related to the number of collisions that occur on the system. Collisions also tend to trigger additional collisions. With the new technology, it is possible to lower speed limits immediately and to close lanes when a collision occurs; a significant reduction in secondary collisions has already been noted as a result. The technology will be introduced on I-90 between I-5 and I-405 in the next year.

One of the recommendations of the corridor plan is to implement the system throughout the corridor from Bellevue to Issaquah. Traffic coming off of Snoqualmie Pass moving at the posted speed of 70 miles per hour downhill into Snoqualmie and Issaquah often encounters traffic backed up on ramps and a lot of speed differential. The technology will allow drivers to be forewarned. Another recommendation is to convert the existing HOV lanes on I-90 to hot lanes. The Puget Sound Regional Council recently adopted a policy that directs the implementation of hot lanes on the HOV system by 2020.

Ms. Hunter allowed that WSDOT is concerned that once tolling begins on SR-520 some traffic will be diverted to I-90. The legislature has considered implementing tolls on I-90 to prevent diversion and to help with funding SR-520.

Hot lanes have loops embedded in the pavement that register traffic speeds and volumes. The information is sent to a computer that estimates what the toll should be. The focus is on making sure that traffic in the hot lane is traveling a minimum of 45 miles per hour. The first hot lanes were implemented on SR-167 where the HOV lane was not being fully utilized and where there was a lot of congestion in the general purpose lanes. The minimum toll is fifty cents and at one time it rose as high as \$9.00 when there was a collision causing congestion in the general purpose lanes. The average toll is closer to \$1.50.

Ms. Hunter explained that an auxiliary lane is defined as a lane that is generally between two interchanges and which gives traffic extra space to get on and off a freeway. Auxiliary lanes promote overall traffic flow in that they keep traffic from having to merge immediately. WSDOT has found that a couple of auxiliary lanes are needed on I-90, particularly eastbound between Eastgate Way and Lakemont Boulevard. At the Eastgate Way interchange there are three ramps that merge into a single lane and flows into I-90. On the ramp the volumes are equivalent to an entire freeway lane during the evening peak. As currently configured, merging with the main line on I-90 is required almost immediately.

The options for providing the auxiliary lane include taking some right-of-way, moving some walls and putting down more pavement, and using the shoulder lane, something that is done often in Europe. With the technology of active traffic management, the shoulder could be used as a lane only when needed and for less money. Approval from

the federal government to run on the shoulder would, however, be required. Modeling shows that the eastbound auxiliary lane would benefit I-90 as well as Bellevue city streets.

The issue facing the westbound commute is slightly different. In the Issaquah area there are a lot of vehicles entering the freeway from Front Street and SR-900. The existing HOV lane was engineered from a general purpose lane, which means drivers can suddenly find themselves in an HOV lane and needing to change lanes right where a lot of volume is flowing in from SR-900, causing the flow to break down. By adding an auxiliary lane there in conjunction with active traffic management, some of the problem could be alleviated.

Ms. Hunter said the use of the shoulder as an auxiliary lane is not widespread throughout the nation but is practiced in some places. Each instance is different given specific local engineering issues. A short segment of the shoulder was opened to traffic on US-2 during the evening peak, and that has really improved congestion in that section.

Ms. Hunter shared with the committee a number of speed profiles and explained that they are a graphic way to describe what congestion looks like at given times. She noted that travel in the eastbound direction during the evening peak begins to build at the Eastgate Way interchange and is worst between there and Lakemont Boulevard. If nothing is done, the picture will be much the same in 2015. The modeling shows, however, that with a westbound auxiliary lane, congestion will improve and average vehicle speeds would rise.

Mr. Stanton suggested the committee should consider projects based on the monetary value of the improvements compared against the project costs. He noted that the auxiliary lane modeling indicated an overall trip reduction from thirteen minutes to ten and a half minutes, and a degradation of a thousand vehicles, for a cost of between \$18 million and \$22 million. As projects are brought forward, the improvement should be studied relative to something, which generally is cost, safety, or statewide needs. Ms. Hunter stated that WSDOT does not rely solely on models in reaching decisions; models are certainly used to inform decisions but there are other factors that modeling cannot capture.

Ms. Hunter commented that Bellevue was the first city in the state to construct a roundabout; it was built on West Lake Sammamish Parkway. Based on the projected traffic flow in 2030, the model suggests the existing roundabout should be expanded from one lane to two, and a second roundabout should be constructed near the ramp terminal. Roundabouts slow traffic but do not stop it. Stopped vehicles contribute a great deal to greenhouse gas emissions. Roundabouts improve safety as well; they have no T-bone accidents and greatly reduce the seriousness of accidents. While they often require more right-of-way, the cost of roundabouts in the long run is much less because no signals or other hardware are required.

Mr. Ludtka stated that the biggest issue facing the Eastgate/I-90 area is congestion. He suggested the committee should look for ways to improve throughput in the corridor.

Mr. Perea said he assumed that the state has no future plans for additional on- or off-ramps. Ms. Hunter confirmed that.

Mr. Ludtka asked if the off-ramp at 142nd Avenue SE could be opened up for use by SOVs as well as HOVs. Ms. Hunter said that could possibly happen if it were converted to a hot lane. She said WSDOT is looking at every option for managing the HOV

system.

Mr. Stanton commented that the gantry WSDOT will be implementing is pretty deep into Eastgate. He said when he leaves his home in the morning from Sammamish he has choices with regard to routes, but no information to inform those choices. The City of Issaquah has a traffic information board up on the Plateau; having something similar in the communities that feed I-90 would be very helpful. Locating the gantry further east on I-90 would also give traffic coming into the valley some data to go by before getting to Front Street in Issaquah.

Mr. Pucher asked what hoops must be jumped to gain approval to use the shoulders as drive lanes. Ms. Hunter said details must be considered on a site-by-site basis. It is not necessarily a good idea to have traffic driving fast too close to retaining walls, and there are other safety issues to be taken into consideration.

C. Bellevue College Review of Upcoming BC Master Plan Update

Discussion of the item was postponed to a later date. In its place, Cynthia Welti, CAC member and Executive Director of the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway Trust, gave a presentation on the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway and its relationship to the Eastgate/I-90 corridor.

Ms. Welti said the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway begins on the shores of Puget Sound and extends 100 miles to the east. The Greenway encompasses wilderness areas where one can get away for a week and not see anyone as well as recreation areas such as Mercer Slough. The Greenway is all about the fact that forests and farms can be part of the local economy and can balance the natural and built environments.

The Greenway Trust began with a march in 1990 when a group of local citizens over a period of five days traveled the route from Snoqualmie Pass to Puget Sound. As they walked they marveled at the fact that they were experiencing such natural beauty so close to a major interstate freeway. They concluded they would like to keep things looking as they were. Through collaborative planning, a number of projects were identified along the Greenway which in turn led to some great successes.

There 60 members on the Board of the Greenway Trust, over half of which are government agencies. Also included are prominent business leaders and recreation and conservation voices. Bellevue City Manager Steve Sarkozy is a member of the Board.

Over half of the 1.4 million acres of land in the Greenway is publicly held, some of which came into public ownership since the Greenway Trust began. Lands sought to be added are those that have a particular ecologic or recreation value. The programs run by the Trust include ecological and native area restoration, trail building, tree planting, and environmental education. The Trust celebrates tourism through a program called Greenway Summer that highlights festivals that occur in the area.

Ms. Welti said one of the early successes the Trust had in addressing the gaps in the system was in Cle Elum where a former railroad bed that served the local coal mines was acquired. The six-mile section is now a trail that can be enjoyed by the public. The Trust has also worked with the City of Issaquah on filling in gaps. The Trust is working with the City of Seattle to close a missing gap in their jurisdiction where the trail needs to cross I-5.

On December 16, 2010, the trail section from High Point to Preston was completed. The

Trust worked in partnership with WSDOT to secure the funding needed to construct the trail.

CH2MHill has a representative on the Trust board. The firm conducted some pro bono work with the City's transportation department to simulate what could be done if funding were available to put in a bike trail along the WSDOT right-of-way on the north side of SE 36th Street. A funding request has been made to Scenic Byways to construct the trail connection.

Mr. Loewenherz pointed out that the trail section is part of the ped-bike plan. He said the City has dedicated some funding for a consultant contract that will help to more thoroughly explore how the project might occur.

Ms. Welti said the Greenway Trust includes in its core values sustainable farming, more local access to farming, and promoting local history.

Co-Chair Larrivee asked if the Trust has looked at models that combine commercial and retail uses with the trail system. Ms. Welti said the Trust is certainly open to those connections in light of the fact that trails can be strong assets for businesses.

Ms. Bruce reiterated the fact that there is a lack of connectivity between the north and south sides of I-90.

Mr. Stanton said he would like at some point to see a cross section of the freeway and all ideas relative to improvements, including roadway and trail improvements and a possible Sound Transit III alignment. Ms. Hunter allowed that WSDOT is taking all necessary steps to make sure no projects will preclude the notion of having light rail run along I-90 to Issaquah. Sound Transit has the money to conduct a study starting in 2015 of high-capacity transit from Bellevue to Issaquah.

Mr. Loewenherz reminded the group that high-capacity transit alignment decisions are always complicated to make. Determining possible alignments would be well beyond the scope of the budget for what the CAC is tasked with accomplishing. Mr. Stanton agreed but said it would nonetheless keep in mind the concept of including light rail associated with I-90 through the corridor.

4. Follow-up on CAC Questions from December 2, 2010, Meeting

Senior Planner Mike Bergstrom noted that during the discussion at the December 2 meeting it was clear to staff that some clarification was needed relative to the role of the CAC and where the work of the group will ultimately end up. He reminded the committee that prior to the holidays he had sent out an email with links to reports from other planning endeavors, including the Bel-Red corridor study, the Light Rail Best Practices study, and the Meydenbauer Bay Park and Land Use Plan. He said that of the three, the Bel-Red report was most like what might be produced from the Eastgate/I-90 study. Such studies are not implementation tools but they do create a foundation on which to base future Land Use Code and Comprehensive Plan revisions in addition to CIP projects.

The Eastgate/I-90 study planning horizon is 2030. That does not mean, however, that all of the plans will be implemented in that year; some aspects will be implemented more quickly while others will take longer. At the master planning level, the details are not dwelt on but the ultimate outcomes are. The detailed work to determine how to

implement the vision is another process.

At the December 2 meeting the CAC indicated it would like to look at transit-oriented development projects that have been completed, to analyze them and determine what lessons were learned. Mr. Bergstrom said staff have begun work on that process by looking at local examples; the focus will be expanded to examples outside of the area as well. In ideal settings, transit-oriented developments include a vibrant mix of uses in which people can live, work and play without having to use their automobiles. The ideal is not, of course, always achieved. The local examples include; downtown Renton where there are residential units, limited commercial space, 150 stalls for the park and ride and residential users, and where the developer provides a free bus pass to every unit to encourage the use of transit; the Overlake Station, where there are 500 parking stalls, more than 300 apartment units, a childcare center, and where the residents are offered subsidies to use transit; Redmond, where there are more than 300 units sharing parking stalls with park and ride, bike lockers, and some nice passenger shelters; Northgate, where there is a combination of condominiums and apartments, a cinema, quite a lot of retail space, and some senior housing; and Kent Station, which is an extension of the downtown area served by a commuter rail and bus transit, where there are some 900 parking stalls shared with the park and ride, and bicycle lockers.

5. Upcoming Meetings and Topics

Mr. Bergstrom reminded the committee members about the bus tour of the study area on Saturday, January 8, from 9:30 a.m. to noon. He said the tour will be a good opportunity for the group to apply in a visual sense what has been heard to date and to start thinking about how things could be different in 20 years.

Following the tour, the meetings will begin to focus on land use concepts, environmental considerations, transportation tools, and the development of early potential alternatives. All of that work will eventually inform a preferred alternative and a recommended vision for the corridor.

6. Public Comment

Mr. Brian Parks, vice-president of the Phantom Lake Homeowners Association, said the Phantom Lake drainage basin encompasses a good part of the I-90 Business Park, Airfield Park, and the Boeing and Microsoft properties. He explained that there is an ongoing bottleneck situation having to do with drainage; he allowed that the issues have been raised as part of the Shoreline Master Program update. Adding more impervious surface to the area will only exacerbate the flooding problem. The lake level of Phantom Lake has increased, the result of which is the death of many mature trees. The average level of the lake is above what a previous study set as the peak capacity for the lake. Phantom Lake is a kettle lake, which by definition does not have a natural inlet or outlet. Such lakes often are fed by underground springs or by ground water. A channel hand-dug by a farmer many years ago serves as the only outlet to Lake Sammamish. Algae bloom problems began to appear in the lake following the development of the I-90 Business Park. A great deal of sedimentation flowed into the lake during the construction phase. A six-foot pipe empties into Phantom Lake from the business park; the only outlet is an old two-foot pipe that flows into Phantom Creek. The debate over who should maintain the outlet continues, but regardless the outlet pipe is not matched to the inlet pipes. Accordingly, any storm event only increases the lake level and results in property damage. Studies done in the early 1970s concluded Phantom Lake should be used as a storm drainage detention facility by constructing an outlet control structure or weir on the outlet channel. Ten years later the notion was proposed to residents as a solution to the

algae problem; implementation of the weir triggered lawsuits.

7. Adjourn

Co-Chair Hamlin adjourned the meeting at 7:49 p.m.